



The Virginia Saltwater Review

*Plans and Statistics Department
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<http://www.mrc.virginia.gov>*

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by

Department of Plans and Statistics, Fisheries Management Division

OVERVIEW

Here comes the sun! However, here stays the wind. Though not as intense as in previous weeks, the small craft advisory is still the highlight of the weather report as we go to print. Let's hope the wind lays down and allows some anglers suffering from 'cabin fever' to escape. Water temps to our south range from a low of 55° F at Duck Pier, to a high of 68° F at Oregon Inlet Marina, whereas it is 61° F at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel. The big talking point of the week is the arrival of the big drum, red and black. The Eastern Shore anglers are already reporting some impressive catches both by boat and from the surf, and the action continues to spread. The flounder action continues, as anglers have figured out the trick to target the large doormats again this year. There are numerous items to check out in this addition of the Virginia Saltwater Review, including a blue crab fishery management update (pages 6 and 7), and a reminder that the recreational tautog fishery is currently closed beginning May 1 and continuing through June 24 (see page 8).

VMRC also reminds you to report your trophy striped bass catches (the trophy fishery began May 1) using either the forms provided (pages 9 and 10), or going online and registering your catch (www.vasaltwaterjournal.com). For those anglers that want to participate in the Marine Sportfish Collection Project, remember that Morningstar Marina at Gwynn's Island (formerly known as the Boatel) has been added on as a site (page 11), and expect an announcement in the coming weeks of an additional project site being set-up on the Eastern Shore. And now...the fishing reports!

THE FISHING REPORTS

Chincoteague-

Donna at Captain Bob's reports the best hot spot is right in front of the marina, and to the west of the sandbar for flounder. A few flounder are being caught in the Fingers, but the throwback ratio is quite high, with anglers catching and releasing dozens before landing a keeper. The Assateague Channel continues to produce good fishing, especially south of the Assateague Bridge, with a much lower throw back ratio. Gulp Alive continues to be popular bait, but the traditional squid, minnow, and silversides dominate. Double rigs continue to give success, with pink still being the number one color of choice. Fishing in the 4 Mouths Area is sparse, due to difficult passage. A few bluefish have been spotted, along with puppy drum (juvenile red

drum). No hook and line anglers have caught trout, but nets are bringing in a few, so look for the trout to start biting soon.

Wachapreague –

The Wachapreague Marina Flounder Tournament had a great turnout. The first place flounder weighed in at 7 pounds, 12 ounces. The second and third place catches weighed in at 7 pounds, 7 ounces and 7 pounds, 5 ounces, respectively.

At Captain Zeds, The Hotel Wachapreague and Captain Zeds Spring Flounder Tournament also had a phenomenal turnout for the 10-day tournament. James Collins of Delaware came in first place, bringing in a 7-pound, 14-ounce flounder. Second and third place went to Pennsylvanians Kim Herman (7-pound, 11-ounce) and John Eshleman (7-pound, 7-ounce), respectively. All used squid and minnow bait combination. Staff reports the tournament was the best start they have seen in a long time. A few black sea bass citations were issued during the week, but the most impressive citation went to Mike Shreve. Mike landed a 20-pound, 6-ounce tautog on the F/V FISHING FANATIC at the Monroe Wreck site.

Cape Charles -

Staff from Chris' Bait and Tackle are seeing an increase in activity. J.P. Hubbard caught and released three red drum measuring 51, 48, and 47 inches each. Mr. Hubbard caught the fish off the barrier islands using peeler crab for bait. Steve Stevenson of Hungers brought in a 6-pound speckled trout caught with grub. The staff has received reports of flounder being seen in the south bay, and black drum coming in around buoys 13 through 16.

Ernie at Cherrystone Bait and Tackle reports sightings of flounder on Seaside inside the barrier islands. The flounder are beginning to move into the bay. Croaker and black drum have yet to move. However, with the warming temperatures, fishermen should start seeing an increase in the croaker and black drum.

Onancock –

According to Captain Wil croaker are being caught throughout the area. A few flounder have been spotted. Weather has put a damper on fishing, with few boats going out. Water temperature is around 60 degrees. Hopefully the weather will clear up and make way for some good fishing.

Lower Bay/Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel –

Tautog was once again the catch of the week at Cobb's Marina. A citation tautog (9-pounds, 6-ounces, 23 ¾ inches) was caught using crab by Kelly Williams of Virginia Beach in the lower Chesapeake Bay.

Sunset Boating Center is still waiting for the season, and good weather, to pick up. Few tautog are being caught out at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel.

The staff at the Salt Ponds Marina are seeing little activity, though a few flounder are being brought in.

Staff from York River Fishing Center (formally A&S Feed and Bait Supply) are beginning to see croaker around the pier, which is later than usual. It was a good week of fishing across the bay, especially for one young fisherman. Six-year-old Thomas Horsely landed a 10-pound, 8 ounce flounder.

Ken Neill, reporting secretary for the Peninsula Anglers Club, contributed the following:

The big red drum run is going on strong. Anglers are having great success catching bull reds in the 46 to 52 inch range. The best location has been the inlet between Fisherman's and Smith Islands. The preferred bait has been whole hard crab. Black drum are also being caught but these have been smaller blacks with a few pushing 50 pounds. The run of trophy blacks has not taken off yet but some big blacks should be caught this week. The tautog season is closing with a bang. The season is closed as of May 1. The tautog bite has been fantastic with a lot of fish caught with some large ones in the 20-pound class weighed in. Flounder are receiving a fair amount of attention and anglers are finding some fish large enough to meet the 19-inch minimum. Fish are being caught at Back River Reef, 36 A, along the CBBT, and in the seaside inlets of the Eastern Shore. Croaker are being caught in all of the rivers. The speckled trout bite is getting better in the Mobjack Bay area. Some are available on Poquoson Flats and in Back River and the bite is pretty good on the Eastern Shore seaside. Specks are also being caught inside Rudee and Lynnhaven Inlets. Offshore anglers out of Virginia are deep dropping and having good luck with sea bass, tilefish, snowy grouper, wreckfish, and blackbelly rosefish. A bit further south, offshore boats out of the Outer Banks are encountering more yellowfin tuna, some wahoo, dolphin, and a few billfish have been caught.

Dr. Julie Ball, IGFA International Representative for Virginia Beach, contributed the following:

With all the major players in place, the saltwater spring fishery is now in full gear, and the interest in drum is rising to the top of the list. Although the drum fishery is no where near what it will become, anglers are reporting catches of big red drum, with the barrier islands of the Eastern Shore offering some catches of fish to over 50-inches. Peeler crabs, blue crabs, and bunker fished on the shoals and in the surf can put you into some escalating red action. These fish are fierce fighters, and can weigh in upwards of 50-pounds.

The red drum's close cousin, the black drum, is also on the move, pushing its way into the usual haunts. These two species are often caught in the same areas. Some larger fish are also coming from the seaside inlets along the Eastern Shore, especially from the Machipongo and Quinby areas, while smaller fish are still coming from the surf.

With the wind and muddy water, flounder pounders are struggling to find fish, with protected areas offering the best opportunity. Long Bay Pointe Bait and Tackle reports that some keepers are coming from within Lynnhaven Inlet, along with lots of 4-pound snapper bluefish. According to The Fishing Center, surf anglers are also pulling in lots of snapper blues and scattered flatfish from the bulkheads and the beaches from within Rudee Inlet. The Oyster area and Ship Shoal Inlet on the Eastern Shore are providing limits of keepers, while drifters at buoy 36A are also hooking a few flatties in between dogfish encounters.

Some good numbers of speckled trout are coming from lower bay inlets and shallows. Folks fishing the inshore waters in Oyster as well as the Eastern Shore seaside inlets, are also catching decent fish up to six pounds on peeler crabs, live bait, and swimming lures. Puppy drum are also available in these same areas.

Croaker are hitting along the ocean front, the Hampton Bar, and the lower bay rivers and creeks. The Ocean View Fishing Pier reports steady action lately, with anglers hauling up a mixed bag of croaker, spot, sea mullet, gray trout to 26-inches, and striped bass to 24-inches. Anglers are finding the best luck on blood worms, squid, and Fishbites, especially after dusk.

Some nice sea bass are coming from both inshore and offshore locations, with squid, cut bait, and jigs, such as the Braid Slammer jig, working well. Grouper, wreckfish, and big blueline and golden tilefish, are coming from deep waters off Virginia.

The Carolina offshore fishing fleets are experiencing good numbers of gaffer dolphin, as well as decent numbers of yellowfin tuna. Wahoo and marlin are also adding a little variety.

Virginia Middle Bay –

Heidi of Jett's Hardware reports croaker are being caught in the Great Wicomico River on artificial bloodworms, mostly in shallow water. Expectations are high for a good start to the striped bass season as excellent reports have been filtering down from Maryland. In addition, some flounder are also being seen in the area.

Smith's Point Marina has also heard reports of large striped bass coming out of Maryland. Croaker are being caught in the shallows as well.

Locklies Marina reports that while the number of fishermen has been very low, the fishing has been good. Croaker are the most abundant fish around there right now, but other fish are starting to show up, including flounder, bluefish and trout. So dust off those rods and catch some dinner!

Garrett's Marina reports that people fishing from the banks have done well on croaker, as long as you can reach water that is 5 to 8 feet deep.

Capt. Jim, out of the Rappahanock River, has the following report:

Some reports are starting to filter in on the flounder and croaker. Flounder have been caught at the Cell on the Eastern Shore; also some striped bass are in the same area but are being released when caught. The nets are bringing in croaker from the same area but not much going on the hook and line. In the Rappahannock there are croaker, but only in shallow waters. With a lot of patience, a nice catch can be accumulated. In the Piankatank River, the same is true but at least some fish are arriving. Nothing going on in the Chesapeake Bay off of Gwynn's Island, as the deeper water is just too cold for the fish to bite yet.

Virginia Beach –

Virginia Beach Fishing Center is seeing an increase in puppy drum (juvenile red drum), and speckled trout in the inlet. Taylor bluefish are populating the inlet in vast numbers. In the offshore scene, anglers are seeing good fishing with tilefish and grouper.

Virginia Piers –

The Lynnhaven Fishing Pier opens today, May 2nd, for the 2008 season.

The Virginia Beach Pier is still seeing little action. A few bluefish are being caught, but it has been a very slow week. Very few have been going out, possibly due to inclement weather.

The Sandbridge Pier reports numerous bluefish at the Little Island Fishing Pier, but not much of anything else.

Outer Banks, NC –

Water temperatures have now risen into the upper 50's. Speckled trout, in the 2 to 3 pound range, are being caught in good numbers with Green Island Slough (in Oregon Inlet) being a hotspot. Triggerfish and sheepshead are being caught around the pilings of the Oregon Inlet Bridge as well.

Pier fishermen continue to be rewarded with good catches of speckled trout in the early morning, and bluefish keeping lines tight throughout the day. Additional catches of dogfish, skates and rays were also keeping anglers busy.

People trolling offshore, out of Oregon Inlet, were having luck with scattered dolphin, yellowfin tuna, makos, and the occasional blue marlin. Bottom fishermen continue to have success with tilefish, and black sea bass.

The fishing reports for surf fishermen, south of Oregon Inlet down to Cape Hatteras, are very encouraging as well. Bluefish, blowfish, sea mullet and flounder were on the dinner table for many fishermen working on the north and south beaches over the past week. Ramp 43 and the Avon ramps seemed to be favorite areas for those tasty sea mullet. A few big drum are also showing up during the evening and nighttime hours around Cape Hatteras Point.

Offshore fishing out of Cape Hatteras has been good (if you can put up with choppy waters) with people bringing in good catches of dolphin, wahoo, yellowfin tuna, and king mackerel. Bluefish continue to dominate the catches of inshore fishermen.

If you have additional information or would like further details contact Joe Grist at (757) 247-2237.

Please credit the Virginia Marine Resources Commission's [THE SALTWATER REVIEW](#) as the source of the fishing information.

For immediate release
April 22, 2008

Contact: John M.R. Bull
757-247-2269 (office)
757-509-0969 (cell)

NEWPORT NEWS, VA. – Virginia fishery regulators have voted to cut the crab harvest by 34 percent this year, partly by abolishing the winter dredging of hibernating crabs and by closing the season for female crabs a month early.

A series of harvest restrictions passed Tuesday by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission were in an effort to shore up a Chesapeake Bay blue crab population that has been teetering on the edge of collapse for several years.

“The scientific data is overwhelming and without doubt identifies a problem that must be addressed decisively,” said VMRC Commissioner Steven G. Bowman. “To delay or to take half measures would be irresponsible.”

The latest Bay-wide crab population survey, released last week, shows the number of crabs dropped by 16.1 percent below the already dangerously low levels documented over the past decade.

The survey prompted Maryland to agree to a 34 percent cut in that state’s crab harvest, through measures to be enacted in the next few weeks. The governors of both states support the cutbacks.

The nine-member VMRC board led the way in voting Tuesday to:

- Eliminate Virginia’s winter dredge season for the 53 watermen licensed to participate in that fishery.
- Close the season for the taking of female crabs as of Oct. 27. The state’s crab pot season normally closes on Nov. 30.
- Abolish the recreational crab pot license, which allowed up to five pots per license holder. Current law allows Virginia residents to set up to two crab pots without a license.
- Reduce the number of crab pots and peeler pots permitted per license by 30 percent as of next year, and by 15 and 30 percent respectively this May. The number of pots currently allowed per license ranges from 100 to 500.
- Require two additional, wider crab pot escape rings -- known as cull rings -- as of July 1, except the seaside of the Eastern Shore. At that time, two cull rings in a crab pot must be $2 \frac{3}{8}$ ths of an inch in diameter, in addition to the currently required rings of $2 \frac{3}{16}$ ths and $2 \frac{5}{16}$ ths of an inch. This will allow larger crabs to escape.

The Commission also voted to summon any watermen convicted of two crab conservation violations in a one-year period before the board for a license revocation hearing.

Perhaps the most contentious of the regulations was the decision to the end the dredging of crabs in the winter.

Between half to three-quarters of the crabs dug out of the sand and mud in the winter are either cut up, smashed, or killed – just a few months before they emerge to spawn. Of the 300 comments received by VMRC in the past few months, a clear majority favored abolishing the wasteful winter dredge season.

The Commission formally asked for state assistance, if available, for crab dredgers who will be out of work this winter as a result of regulation changes.

The new harvest restrictions came on top of other VMRC regulation changes over the past two months aimed at protecting the blue crab, including:

- Prohibiting anyone else from entering the winter crab dredge season and capping the current

number of licensed dredgers at 53.

- Requiring both cull rings on crab pots to be open at all times. One had been allowed to be closed in certain locations.
- Increase the minimum size of peeler crabs from 3 inches to 3.25 inches until July 15 and then to 3.5 inches for the rest of the season. This matched Maryland's regulations.
- Allow only one other person to be authorized to work a waterman's crab pots, instead of the many that had been allowed.

Despite conservation measures taken by Virginia and Maryland over the past decade, and lowered crab harvest targets set year after year, the total Bay-wide harvest of crabs dropped from 89 million pounds in 1997 to 44 million pounds last year.

And still the abundance of crabs in the Chesapeake Bay remains 70 percent lower than population estimates in the early 1990s.

Water quality, oxygen dead zones, loss of underwater grass beds that shelter juvenile crabs likely played a role in the drastic reduction of the Bay's crab population.

But scientific data shows that overfishing has played a role as well.

Total crab harvest targets in Virginia have been exceeded in 12 of the past 16 years, and overfishing has cut into the species' ability to reproduce in eight of the past 11 years.

Because the crab's life cycle takes it from the ocean, through the lower Chesapeake Bay and into Maryland's waters, both states decided to work together to find a Bay-wide solution.

"We hope and expect that acting together we can turn this around," Bowman said. "The crab is resilient and a prolific breeder, and our actions should save the species and rebuild the population so that harvest levels for our watermen will return to where they should be."

SPECIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE USE OF RECREATIONAL CRAB POTS

The Commission eliminated the 5-pot commercial license for recreational purposes, effective May 1, 2008. After May 1, 2008, no license to take crabs, by crab pot, for recreational or personal use, shall be issued, and any license purchased, prior to May 1, shall be null and void.

Section §28.2-226 of the Code of Virginia still provides an exemption for licensing requirements for the following activities:

1. Except as otherwise provided by regulation, taking by dip net, hand line, or two crab pots, as much as one bushel of hard crabs and two dozen peeler crabs in any one day for personal use only.

The Commission also deemed that statewide, except for the Seaside of Eastern Shore—by emergency Regulation, effective July 1, 2008, two 2 3/8-inch cull rings are required, in addition to the 2 5/16" and 2 3/16" cull rings that are already required. All 4 cull rings are to be open in any crab pot placed, set or fished in any tidal waters, except the Seaside of Eastern Shore where pots shall contain a 2 3/16" and 2 5/16" cull ring, both to be open.

Remember, buoys of any crab pot, used for recreational purposes, shall be marked with the licensee's last 4 numbers of his or her social security number or driver's license number, preceded by the letter "R". And you must follow all minimum size limits and season restrictions that apply to the commercial fishery, including, no harvest of female blue crabs beginning October 27 through December 31.

IMPORTANT RECREATIONAL REGULATION CHANGES TO REMEMBER FOR 2008

TAUTOG

[\[Regulation 4 VAC 20-960-10 et seq.\]](#)

Minimum Size Limit.....14 inches

Possession Limit.....4 per person

Closed Season: May 1 through June 24



SUMMER FLOUNDER

[\[Regulation 4 VAC 20-620-10 et seq.\]](#)

2008 Season OpensMarch 1

Closed Season.....July 21 through July 30

Minimum Size Limit.....19 inches

Possession Limit.....5 per person

The above flounder restrictions apply to Virginia tidal waters, except that in Virginia's Potomac River tributaries the minimum size limit, closed season, and possession limit will be the same as established by [PRFC](#) for the mainstem Potomac River.



2008 STRIPED BASS RECREATIONAL TROPHY REPORT

FORM

**THIS REPORT MUST BE FILLED OUT AND MAILED OR HAND
DELIVERED TO VMRC NO LATER THAN JUNE 30, 2008.**

Each fisherman, captain, or boat operator is responsible for complying with all restrictions and requirements contained in regulation 4VAC 20-252-10 ET SEQ. Regulation 4VAC 20-252-10 ET SEQ. requires all striped bass kept during the trophy season be reported.

**** This page is for summary purposes only ****

FISHING SEASONS: Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries--May 1 (12:01 AM) - June 15 (11:59 PM), 2008
Coastal Virginia waters--May 1 (12:01 AM) - May 15 (11:59 PM), 2008
Potomac River tributaries--April 19 (12:01 AM) - May 15 (11:59 PM), 2008

TROPHY POSSESSION SIZE: 32-inch minimum; except for Potomac River Tributaries, where there is a 28 minimum.

POSSESSION LIMIT: 1 trophy-size fish per person. When fishing from a boat or vessel, where the entire catch is held in a common hold or container, the possession limit shall be for the boat or vessel and shall be equal to the number of persons on board, legally eligible to fish, multiplied by the applicable personal possession limit. The captain or operator of the boat or vessel shall be responsible for any boat or vessel possession limit.

GEAR: Hook and Line fishing only

NO SALE OF HOOK & LINE CAUGHT STRIPED BASS

NO POSSESSION of Trophy striped bass in the spawning reaches (defined below) May 1 through June 15.

- James River - from a line connecting Dancing Point and New Sunken Meadow Creek upstream to a line connecting City Point and Packs Point.
- Pamunkey River - from the Route 33 Bridge at West Point upstream to a line connecting Liberty Hall and the opposite shore.
- Mattaponi River - from the Route 33 Bridge at West Point upstream to the Route 360 Bridge at Aylett.
- Rappahannock River - from the Route 360 Bridge at Tappahannock upstream to the Route 1 Bridge at Falmouth.
- Alteration of striped bass while aboard any boat or vessel or while fishing from shore or pier so that total length cannot be determined is prohibited.
- Spearing or gaffing or attempting to spear or gaff striped bass is prohibited.
- Transfer of any striped bass to another person while on the water or while fishing from a pier or shore is prohibited.
- Striped bass fishing is prohibited in Federal waters (beyond the Virginia three-mile limit line).

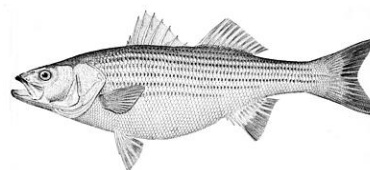
REPORT FORM HELPFUL HINTS:

- You must include length information on each trophy size striped bass that is kept.
- VMRC would appreciate any length information on striped bass that are released, please see the other side of this form.
- Lengths are total lengths in inches (to nearest 1/4 inch). Total length is measured in a straight line from tip of nose to tip of tail.
- Weights (in pounds) are optional
- TO REPORT REGULATION VIOLATIONS: 1-800-541-4646
- TROPHY REPORTING QUESTIONS: 1-800-937-9247

RETURN FORM TO:

**VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION
PLANS AND STATISTICS DEPARTMENT
2600 WASHINGTON AVENUE, 3RD FLOOR
NEWPORT NEWS VA 23607-0756**

On-line reporting is available:



www.vasaltwaterjournal.com

2008 RECREATIONAL TROPHY STRIPED BASS SEASON REPORT FORM

PLEASE PRINT ALL INFORMATION

NAME: _____

(USE AS MANY FORMS AS NECESSARY)

DATE	WATER BODY WHERE FISH WERE CAUGHT	NUMBER OF STRIPED BASS CAUGHT	NUMBER OF STRIPED BASS KEPT












[illegible]

THE VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION

***WANTS YOUR FISH....
TO MEASURE AND AGE.***

***You catch it, you fillet it,
but instead of throwing the remains in the trash,
please donate them to science.***

The Marine Sportfish Collection Project will focus on species of fish that are difficult to collect through the agency's normal sampling program. Anglers are asked to donate their filleted carcasses (head and tail intact) of legal and fresh-caught:

COBIA		RED DRUM	
SHEEPSHEAD		BLACK DRUM	
SPADEFISH		TAUTOG	
TILEFISH		GROUPE	
KING MACKEREL		SPANISH MACKEREL	
BLUEFISH (OVER 16 POUNDS OR 36 INCHES)			

In return for participating in the project, the agency will provide a **FREE PROJECT TEE SHIRT or HAT FOR EACH PARTICIPANT.**

Please visit these bait and tackle merchants to participate:

Bell Isle Marine (Hampton)

Chris' Bait and Tackle (Capeville)

Long Bay Pointe Marina (Virginia Beach)

Morningstar Marina – Gwynn's Island (formerly known as the Gwynn's Island Boatel)



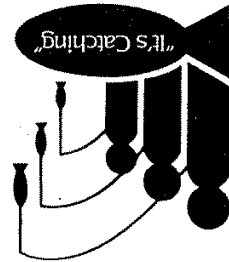
Website: http://mrc.virginia.gov/rec_assessment/index.shtm

As of 04/21/2008



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Practice

CAREFUL CATCH

REDUCE STRESS FACTORS THAT KILL FISH

Exhaustion * Loss of Slime * Wounds * Time out of Water